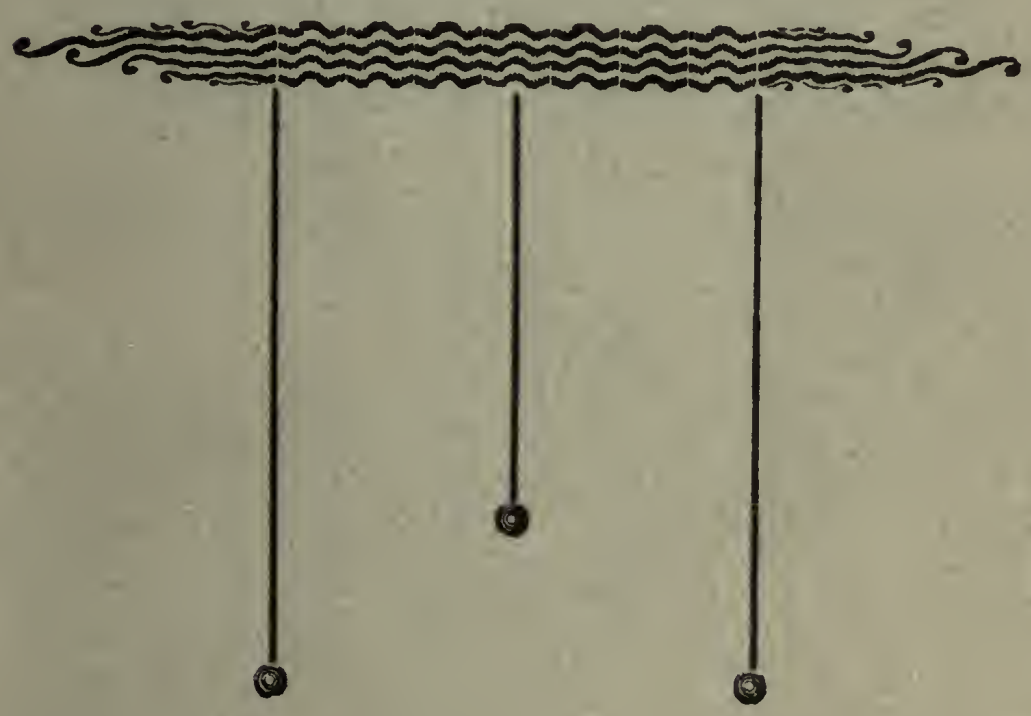
A TRIP ACROSS THE PLAINS IN 1854. . . . .

BY JAMES H. RICHEY



F593
R5

67444

A Trip Across the Plains in 1854

By James H. Richey

Richey, California, March 15, 1908.

Just fifty-four years ago to-day, in 1854, I left my home in Illinois for the trip across the plains. After bidding all good-bye, brother Thomas took us, Alex and I, to Mr. Miller's, where Mr. Strahn had his outfit, but they had started. We overtook them at DeHague's. We then transferred our luggage to the ox team.

Our company consisted of Miller Strahn, Tom Eberley, Bill Henry, John Flemmings, Alex Richey and James Richey from Illinois and S. Steele, Mose Knox, Abe Earnest and Wm. Morse from Iowa.

Arriving at the Mississippi river we experienced our first

ferrying of cattle. After considerable trouble we got a load on the ferry boat, "The Flint Hills." When it cast off for the other side the cattle were greatly excited and rushed from one side to the other, tipping the boat, and crowded four or five head into the river. On the upper side one went under the boat, coming up, followed the boat across making nearly as good time as we did. We then named her Mississippi. When other rivers were to ford she readily led the herd across.

We stayed four miles west of Burlington the first night. The fifth day we arrived at Bloomfield, the home of Mr. Steele, had dinner, then took cattle to farm seven miles from town, stayed two weeks, here finishing our outfit for the trip. On Monday morning broke our first camp grounds and left for the long trip to the "Golden State." Went south, passed a short distance into Missouri, then west to the Missouri river, up this river to St. Mary's, twelve miles below Omaha, where we camped for a few days waiting to be ferried across the river. On the 28th of April Hopper's train joined us here, where we had our first sight of Indians, two hundred or more of the Omaha tribe, all great beggars. Here commenced guard duty for the next three months. I was on duty the after part of the night. It was a stormy night and the cattle very uneasy. We were each on guard one-half night every fifth night. On April 29 left the settlements and started out on the plains and passed over some fine looking country. Crossing the Elk Horn river, we ferried the wagons and let the cattle swim, then the Loupe Fork of the Platte river which we ferried; came to the Platte river at Grand Island, one hundred miles from Missouri. Here we saw the first Pawnee Indians, much finer looking than the

Omahas and were very friendly. We now traveled up Platte river, having fine feed and good roads. Saw but few buffaloes, as but few had come north as yet. Here we had our first stampede. We had been in camp and had our supper. A heavy thunderstorm stampeded the cattle, they going with the storm, but the men stayed with them, getting them back to camp about two o'clock in the morning; had all of our cattle and the most of another train's.

Following the Platte there was nothing of note for some time, regular daily duty. We separated company with Hopper, traveling by ourselves, three wagons and ten men. One day we came to the camp of a train that had part of their horses stolen and had to throw some of their wagons away. We took two of their men, also a wagon, cutting ours up and carrying it for wood, as there was none on our route. Following the Platte we had our first view of the Rocky Mountains, Laramie Peak, said to be two hundred miles away. We were in sight of it for four weeks. The next thing of interest was Chimney Rock, on south side of Platte, about twenty miles away, looked some like a chimney in the distance, height some 150 feet. Next was Court House Rock which resembled a large building. We arrived at Fort Laramie on May 25, being the first building after leaving Omaha. Here was our first chance for mailing letters. Strahn crossed the river at the Fort.

After leaving Laramie we had our first mountain travel through the Black Hills. The view was fine but very rough roads. On guard one night I saw what I thought was an Indian coming towards the cattle. After watching it a short time I made up my mind to find out, so I crawled on my hands and

knees some one hundred yards and found my Indian was a little mule that had strayed from a camp some distance from us. We traveled up Platte river to the north crossing where the road from the south crosses to the north and joined the road on which we were traveling from Ft. Laramie, one hundred miles. Here we left the Platte and crossed to the Sweet Water, still on the Oregon trail; table land country, very good roads. We met the Cheyenne tribe of Indians on their way down to hunt buffalo and fight the Pawnee. A trader said there was about five thousand men, women and children. They had their belongings packed on horses and dogs, tent poles on the sides, the back ends dragging and baskets lashed to these with children in them. The morning before reaching Sweet Water we had a stampede of our horses. While we were yoking up they pulled their picket pins and were off. As they passed me I grabbed one of the ropes; it pulled me down but Strahn was near and held it. He threw a saddle on it and followed them, catching them at Sweet Water, some ten miles away. We arrived there about noon feeling very good that he had them. We followed this river to the south pass of the Rockies.

Places of note on Sweet Water: Independence Rock, laying in the valley, covering about ten acres and one hundred feet high. Five miles from Independence Rock is Devil's Gate, where the river passes through a chasm of rock three hundred and fifty feet in depth. On the south side of the cliff overhanging the river, laying down I crawled out and looked down at the river. It looked like a small rivulet. After passing this point, the next was the Ice Fields, when digging down from one to two feet in the ground we found solid ice, said to be four miles

wide. Following the river up to the last crossing, ten miles from the summit, which was our last camp on the east side of the Rockies. In the morning we had a heavy sleet and snow storm, very cold. Cleared up by seven o'clock and had a fine day crossing the summit.

About noon June 10th, stopped for dinner at Pacific Springs. The water flows to the Pacific ocean from here through the Colorado river. From here the road leads to the Little Sandy, a branch of Green River. Here the Salt Lake road and the Oregon road, form the Salt Lake road. Bearing south, we kept the Oregon southwest; from Little Sandy we crossed to Big Sandy some twenty miles where we camped till the next day noon. In the forenoon we were busy shoeing cattle and preparing for crossing the Green River Desert, fifty-four miles, with no water. This is a sage brush country, with considerable bunch grass. We started at noon and traveled till near night, camped and had supper. About dark a heavy rainstorm came up so we had plenty of water for cattle as well as feed. It cleared up about midnight and we hitched up and put out for Green river, which we reached about nine o'clock the next morning. This is a fine looking stream, some two hundred yards wide, clear and deep, with a rapid current.

They were well prepared to handle the travel having fourteen ferry boats. Charged $5 per wagon without any team. Our ferry bill was $30 which we paid in bacon at fifty cents per pound. We had a hard time getting our cattle to take the river. They would start, then when they struck the current they would down stream and back. We finally got them across about the middle of the afternoon. We went down the river

some fourteen miles and camped here and had some trouble with a horse train. Strahn had put our horses on an island early that morning and during the day a horse train had put their horses on the same island where they forbid us putting our cattle on. Strahn said there was plenty of feed for both but they said no, the first animal that we drive across they would shoot. Stepping to a wagon he took a shot gun down also Mr. Hopper and several more of our men standing on the bank of the slough. Strahn told them his cattle were coming across and the first man that fired on them he would kill. He then ordered the cattle driven in which we did. but they backed down and got out of our way. We put on double guard but had no more trouble. The next morning he gave the captain of the train some good advice. In the morning we left Green River traveling through a mountain country with plenty of water and good feed. At Forest Grove about midnight the cattle stampeded. They were lying quiet when they jumped to their feet and were off like a shot. We were up and after them in a hurry. They ran down the mountain side into a deep canyon, but when they tried to climb the other side, it being very steep. we soon got ahead of them and drove them back to camp where they soon quieted down for the night. The only accident to a wagon was mine which I upset coming down a mountain to Bear River, breaking the top off. We followed down Bear river to Soda Springs, where there was a trading post, about sixty miles north of Salt Lake. A spring of very pleasant tasting water lies on the bank of the river Steam boat spring near a gushing spring through a hole about four inches in diameter, recedes out of sight then gushes several feet into the air, making a sound very

much like a steam boat.

Our next point is the Humbolt. After leaving Soda Springs some six miles, we have the Oregon trail which goes north. We took the sublet cut-off which goes southwest into the Goose Creek mountains. When leaving the Oregon trail we passed over a volcanic country covered with rock resembling broken black bottles and fissures where we dropped rocks to an unknown depth. Goose Creek mountains are quite rough, but plenty of feed and water. Northwest Salt Lake then came to Raft river, a branch of Snake river, which we followed up for some distance. The morning we left the river we passed a train of wagons encamped. They had had their horses stolen that morning. We followed up a small stream into Thousand Spring Valley. Here we found both hot and cold water. At the head of the valley we passed the divide between the Raft river and the Humbolt river, which we reached on July 3rd, crossed to the south side and traveled along the foot of the mountains, where we found fine feed and good streams of water. We traveled very slowly here to let the cattle recruit. Found a few Mormon settlers here. They said they were going back to Salt Lake. Crossed the south fork of the river then had a mountain range to cross, coming to the main Humbolt river, Gravelly Ford, about half way down the river.

From here the country to the Sink is sage brush, with meadow along the river. One day we suffered for water, leaving the river at sunrise we went through sage brush and sand country until sundown, with no water to be had, both cattle and men were wild for water. Arriving at the river, the cattle rushed in and the boys grabbing tin cups, waded out past the cattle to

clear water about waist deep. I think water never tasted better There was a trading post here—they said we traveled forty miles that day. At the Sink we passed around the lake to the west side where we camped till noon the next day, when we took up our line of march to Truckee Desert. It is forty miles across. About sundown we stopped for supper, then resumed our travel, very good roads until we came to heavy sand, about ten miles across. Arrived at Truckee river about ten o'clock and stayed until morning. Traveled up the river to Big Meadows, turned to the right, took Beckwith road, crossing the summit into the valley July 29. Just three months from Missouri river. Here they went into camp to stay three or four weeks.

The next morning five of us shouldered our blankets and started for Dowiesville where we arrived on the third day.